



School Nursing In North Carolina: From A New Idea To The New Deal (Part 2)

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Abstract

Complementing the work of the nurses from the State Board of Health was the effort of hundreds of nurses employed by church and civic groups to provide public health services to their communities. Their work usually included school health. The American Red Cross employed some 50 nurses between 1912 and 1935 to work in community health programs in NC (Kernodle, 1949). Goldie Allen, RN was a Red Cross Nurse assigned to Avery county in 1928. As part of her duties she wrote articles on health related topics for the local paper, the Advocate. In one, she described the relationship between poor health and poor academic progress. Her sentiments are as relevant today as the day she wrote them. "Children with impaired vision, deaf ears, diseased tonsils, adenoids, undernourished bodies or fatigued nervous systems cannot possibly do the work of normal children" (Avery Country Red Cross, 1928).

Pollitt, P. & Reese, C. (1997). School Nursing In North Carolina: From A New Idea To The New Deal (Part 2). **American History of Nursing Bulletin**, Fall, 4-6. NC Docks permission to re-print granted by author(s).

SCHOOL NURSING IN NORTH CAROLINA: FROM A NEW IDEA TO THE NEW DEAL.

Part II. (Continuation of Part I published in the Summer 1997 issue).

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Complementing the work of the nurses from the State Board of Health was the effort of hundreds of nurses employed by church and civic groups to provide public health services to their communities. Their work usually included school health. The American Red Cross employed some 50 nurses between 1912 and 1935 to work in community health programs in NC (Kernodle, 1949). Goldie Allen, RN was a Red Cross Nurse assigned to Avery county in 1928. As part of her duties she wrote articles on health related topics for the local paper, the Avery Advocate. In one, she described the relationship between poor health and poor academic progress. Her sentiments are as relevant today as the day she wrote them. "Children with impaired vision, deaf ears, diseased tonsils, adenoids, undernourished bodies or fatigued nervous systems cannot possibly do the work of normal children" (Avery Country Red Cross, 1928).

Allen inaugurated a "Progressive Program for Better Health" for the school children of Avery County. In this program, the school with the highest number of children following eight health habits over a period of time received a silver loving cup. The eight health habits, most still advised today, included: a full bath more than once a week; brushing teeth at least once a day; sleeping long hours with the windows open; drinking as much milk as possible, but no coffee or tea; eating green vegetables or fruit every day; drinking at least four glasses of water a day; playing a part of each day outdoors; and, a bowel movement every morning. The program was endorsed by local doctors, dentists, and school board

representatives and appears to have helped impress upon the children better health habits (Avery County Red Cross, 1928). In other counties, nurses started "Modern Health Crusader" clubs in the schools. These clubs shared the same objectives and many of the same methods as Allen's "Progressive Program for Better Health" (Erhenfeld, 1921).

Allen's report in 1930 details the number of people participating in the clinics she coordinated. Each clinic with its corresponding number of patients is as follows: removal of tonsils and adenoids (95), orthopedics (41 treated), dental problems (503 treated), tuberculosis (180 screened) and typhoid and diphtheria immunizations (2896 given). Additionally, she worked on a county-wide fly eradication campaign, worked to get new water supplies for Newland and Cranberry schools, sent three children to the tuberculosis sanatorium, one to an epileptic colony, two to the school for the blind and five to the school for the deaf and dumb (Report made 1930).

Allen's work was repeated in essence by Red Cross and other locally hired nurses in many counties in the state from 1911 to 1930. Community groups often expressed gratitude for their school nurses. For example, the Watauga County Chamber of Commerce publicly thanked Stella McCarthy, the Red Cross nurse assigned to their county in 1921 by declaring she "... makes it a point to discover the most needful conditions in the county and to give these things her first attention...We are fortunate in having secured the service of one of the most capable public health nurses to be found anywhere (Watauga Democrat, 1921).

Between nurses employed by the State Board of Health, county health departments and church and civic organizations, many schools in NC were receiving at least the rudiments of school nursing services by the late 1920s. However, the Great Depression quickly diminished years of progress. Donations to church and civic groups dried up since approximately one fourth of American citizens lost their jobs (Leuchenberg, 1963). At the same time, tax revenues dropped dramatically and public services

were sharply curtailed or totally eliminated. School nurses and school nursing programs suffered in both public and private areas for most the 1930s.

In 1933, President Roosevelt initiated The New Deal, a series of programs to respond to the economic Depression. These programs provided jobs and services using federal funds to supplement or replace local monies. In NC, several counties decided to use some of their New Deal funds for school nursing services. For example, in Catawba County, the school nurse was hired through a New Deal agency, known as the Emergency Relief Administration, to direct the Catawba County Preventorium for undernourished and underprivileged children. The Preventorium was a cooperative effort to provide medical care, proper nutrition and health education to indigent children. The county government, county hospital, American Legion, American Red Cross and a variety of civic clubs including the Kiwanas Club, Rotary Club, Women's Club, and the Business and Professional Women's Club also contributed to this four month summer program. During the summer of 1935, 73 children were helped at the Preventorium. Of these children, 39 had tonsillectomies, 6 received glasses, 16 had dental work and 20 received other medical treatments. The group ate 3 meals a day, gained a total of 273 pounds, and consumed 5640 quarts of milk. Without the assistance of the federal government it is unlikely these children would have received needed health care or an adequate diet (McKay, 1935).

Another New Deal program involving school nursing in NC was the Special Child Welfare Project conducted under the Civil Works Administration in the spring of 1934. Sixty five registered nurses were employed by the Department of Child Health Work under the State Board of Health for 15 weeks. Of these nurses, 35 were assigned to county health departments and 30 others worked directly for the State Board of Health in counties without a county health department. They worked in 55 of the 100 counties in NC. During the 15 weeks, the CWA nurses visited 781 nursery schools and 3086 public schools. They examined 115,771 children and made

home visits to 17,618 families. In addition, they assisted in 39 dental clinics, gave thousands of immunizations and held 115 health education meetings for teachers and parents (Special Child, 1934).

Health education was another major focus of school nursing work in the 1930s. The NC state legislature, in 1935, passed a law stating that the effects of alcohol and narcotics on the human system would be taught in public schools. School nurses frequently helped with this instruction. In 1936, May 1 was declared National Child Health Day by President Roosevelt. The NC state superintendent of public schools urged local school systems to cooperate with other local agencies to make National Child Health Day activities successful. School nurses across the state planned activities, made exhibits, and gave speeches to celebrate the day. School nurses also helped organize activities in February 1938 for the Second National Social Hygiene Day. The State Department of Public Instruction endorsed a program composed of pamphlets, exhibits and films aimed at the slogan "stamp out syphilis--enemy of youth". School nurses across the state helped direct and implement these activities.

School nursing in NC has continued to grow and make an impact on the children and communities across the state. The commitment and dedication of those pioneers in school nursing have made an indelible mark in the history of nursing in NC. Their vision of providing a better way of life for the children of NC continues to provide a firm foundation for contemporary school nurses as they strive to make a difference today as well as to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

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